

# ***Iowa Outdoors***

## **Iowa Department of Natural Resources**

### **www.iowadnr.com**

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**August 12, 2003**

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## **PHEASANT ROUTES**

By Joe Wilkinson  
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Luckily for Iowa hunters, one route does not a pheasant season make. With a second consecutive mild winter and a decent nesting season, Iowa's pheasant population continues its rebound from the devastating winter of 2000-01. This week, wildlife workers and conservation officers from the Department of Natural Resources are quantifying that rebound, as they conduct their annual upland game surveys.

While valuable for tracking rabbit, quail and partridge populations, the focus of the 30-mile routes is on the ring-necked pheasant. And with more than 200 Iowa routes, the results are pretty dependable. High counts balance out low ones. That's good, because I rode along on one of each. When all are combined, it provides a good indication of pheasant numbers and, come this fall, hunter success as they pursue the Midwest's number one game bird.

Usually, I ride with wildlife technician Dennis Proctor. His Cedar County route loops around the area north of Tipton. Surveys start at dawn, when heavy dew in the fields pushes pheasants up to roadsides to dry off—and to be counted. The fields are late summer lush and green; pretty enough to be stamped on the back of an Iowa quarter. However, something was missing. The pheasants. “We saw only five chicks and two roosters,” bemoaned Proctor of the route that averages about 20 birds. “A big reason was lack of habitat. It was basically just row crops this year, corn and soybeans. Pheasants need hayfields and other grassy areas, for year round cover and high protein insects that young chicks feed on.”

The morning started well. Rarely do we count a pheasant in the route's first five-mile segment. This time, though, a pair of pigeon-sized chicks kicked up dusty puffs of gravel, escaping the slow-moving pickup. A rooster crowed his retreat, winging low across the bean rows. Two more nearly grown chicks tried hiding under a blade of roadside grass. This had the makings of a good ride. From there, though, we could have just about dozed off. There were rabbits, to be sure. We even surprised a fox trying to cross the road. However, one more pheasant chick and one more rooster were all Procter could add in the final 25 miles.

Our low count one, though, underscores the importance of getting the big picture; the combined outlook from more than 200 routes. "There are obviously more birds on this route," offered Procter. "With the first pair of chicks, I got out of the pickup and almost stepped on one before they flushed. There might have been another half dozen that didn't come up. Just seeing chicks, tells me a brood was reared there. Other areas with good habitat will see more birds this year."

His words rang true, as I caught a ride with conservation officer Steve Schutte a couple days later. We were only a mile or two into his route south of Clear Lake, when a dark, speckled hen tried to blend into the roadside. Seconds later, the ditch resembled a grassy corn popper, as she and her 14 chicks burst skyward. It was going to be a pretty fair day.

Actually, Schutte was almost apologetic as he nodded to slopes now planted to row crops. "Counts were consistently over 100 birds on this route in the (early 1990s) 'hey day' of the Conservation Reserve Program. Most fields idled now (under new CRP guidelines) are out west and into the Dakotas. The nesting cover just isn't there. Last year, I only counted seven pheasants."

Knowing that we had just doubled the '02 count made us feel a little better. The upswing continued for the next few miles. A young rooster, lacking only the long tail feathers of a mature rooster, cackled as he 'escaped'. Just down the road, a hen bolted into the cornfield. Behind her, a feather coated Ping-Pong ball with wings, popped up, barely clearing the nine-foot high tassels. "Did you see that," laughed Schutte. "I have never seen an August chick that small. I could hear others, too, running. They must have been unable to fly."

He listed 45 pheasants by the end of the run; a number that should rank pretty close to the state average, when results come out next month. And the birds? Again, they were found next to cover. "That set-aside land provides the nesting cover," emphasized Schutte. "That's been consistent year to year. The largest number of birds came from the remaining patches of CRP."

And recalling the sparrow-sized ball of feathers, Schutte laughed. "That was a quite obvious 'late hatch' bird. I can tell hunters we will have a variety of sizes; a lot of (roosters) that won't be colored out very well, opening day."

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## **IOWA DEER HUNTERS WANTED FOR SPECIAL REFUGE HUNT**

MISSOURI VALLEY – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will hold two special muzzleloader deer hunts at the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge this fall. The hunts are scheduled for Oct. 18 to 19, for antlerless deer only, and Dec. 13 to 14, for any deer.

Deer hunters interested in either special hunt must send in or drop off a 3x5 postcard with their name, address and day and night time phone number to the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, 1434 316<sup>th</sup> Lane, Missouri Valley, IA 51555. Hunters must submit separate cards for each hunt.

A random drawing for the first hunt will be held at the DeSoto Visitor Center at 3 p.m., Sept. 5. A random drawing for the second hunt will be held at 3 p.m., Oct. 31, at the same location. Postcards will be accepted until 3 p.m. on the day of the drawing.

A total of 35 Iowa hunters will be selected for each hunt and will be notified by the refuge staff. Refuge specific regulations will apply to the hunts.

Archery hunters may hunt in the refuge from Oct. 1 through Dec. 31. The archery season closes during the firearms season on the Nebraska side from Nov. 15 to 23. Archery hunters are required to possess a refuge hunt brochure, available for free at the refuge, while hunting on refuge land. The brochure outlines specific refuge regulations. There is no special license for the refuge archery hunt needed.

Hunters may hunt on either Nebraska or Iowa ground during any of the special hunts.

**For more information, contact Mindy Sheets, DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, at 712-642-4121.**

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## **FORESTRY BUREAU LANDS FUNDS TO ASSIST PRIVATE LANDOWNERS**

DES MOINES - The Iowa Department of Natural Resource's (DNR) forestry bureau has nearly \$250,000 available to cost-share forestry practices on private lands.

"The funds are a result of two separate programs arriving at about the same time," said Paul Tauke, forestry services supervisor for the DNR. Those programs are

the Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP) – Forest Health Initiative and the Forest Lands Enhancement Program (FLEP).

“SIP Forest Health funds are one time dollars that were awarded through a competitive grant process from the USDA Forest Service,” said Tauke. “These funds are available only in northeast Iowa to improve the vigor of woodland stands in preparation for the expected arrival of the Gypsy moth.”

FLEP, which is a new program authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill, is available statewide and should continue to provide forestry cost-share dollars through 2007.

“What makes the FLEP program different from past forestry cost-share programs is that it is administered through the state forester and handled entirely within the forestry bureau,” said Tauke. “FLEP funds can be used to provide up to 75 percent cost-share reimbursement to landowners for a variety of forestry practices. Those practices include forest stewardship planning, reforestation, forest stand improvement, agroforestry, water quality improvement, wildlife habitat improvement, woodland invasive species control, forest health protection, and fire risk reduction.”

To sign up for FLEP funds, landowners can contact their district forester. District foresters are listed on the DNR’s website at [www.iowadnr.com/forestry/district.html](http://www.iowadnr.com/forestry/district.html). Information on FLEP is also online at [www.iowadnr.com/forestry/costshare.html](http://www.iowadnr.com/forestry/costshare.html).

For more information on either program, contact Tauke at 515-242-6898 or by e-mail at [paul.tauke@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:paul.tauke@dnr.state.ia.us).

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## **SCOTT COUNTY LAND ITEM ADDED TO AGENDA FOR NRC MEETING**

CHARITON - The Natural Resource Commission (NRC) of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will meet at 8:30 a.m., Thursday, Aug. 14, at the Lucas County Conservation Nature Center, 1 mile south of Chariton, on Hwy. 14. The meeting is open to the public.

Commissioners and DNR staff will meet on Aug. 13, at 1 p.m., for a tour of the area.

Members of the NRC are Joan Schneider, Randy Duncan, Paul Christiansen, Carol Kramer, William Sullivan, Richard Francisco and Janice Marcantonio. The DNR Director is Jeffrey Vonk.

The following is the agenda for the August meeting.

- Approve Agenda
- Approve Minutes of June 12 and June 26 Meetings
- Land Acquisition
  - Lake Darling State Park, Washington County – Dickinson
  - Lake Darling State Park, Washington County – Laux
  - Lake Darling State Park, Washington County – Pepper
  - Skunk River Access, Henry County – Nau and Bergren
  - Tyrone Wildlife Area, Monroe County – DNR/Rathbun Farms
  - **Lost Grove Lake, Scott County – Holst Estate**
- Construction Projects
- Chapter 17 Lease – Matteson Marine Service, Louisa County
- Chapter 18 Lease – Reed, Palo Alto County
- FY05 Budget Request
- Banner Wildlife Area Plan Update
- Conservation and Recreation Donations
- Final Rule – Chapter 61, State Parks and Recreation Areas (Ritz)
- REAP Conservation Education Grant Program
- Forest Legacy Conservation Program – New Melleray Abbey Easement
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 15, General License Regulations
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 77, Endangered and Threatened Plant and Animal Species
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 81, Sport Fishing
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 82, Commercial Fishing
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 87, Mussel Regulations
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 94, Nonresident Deer Hunting
- Notice of Intended Action – Chapter 98, Wild Turkey Spring Hunting
- Adopted and Filed Emergency – Chapter 51, Game Management Areas
- Adopted and Filed Emergency – Chapter 91, Waterfowl and Coot Hunting Seasons
- Wildlife Habitat with Local Entities Grant Review
- Special Deer Hunts
- General Discussion
- Items for Next Meeting – Sept. 11, Viking Lake

**For more information, contact Karyn Stone at 515-281-8650.**

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